

AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES
American Citizens Services Newsletter

U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
April 2008

As a service to U.S. citizens in or traveling to the Australian areas of Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and/or the Northern Territory, we are distributing a periodic American Citizen Services newsletter for U.S. citizens in the consular district of the U.S. Consulate General Melbourne. Through this American Citizens Services newsletter, the Consular Section highlights information on our Web site pertaining to consular procedures, policies, and other topics of general interest to U.S. citizens who have registered with the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit and provided an email address. If you believe others would benefit from receiving this newsletter, please forward it to them and encourage them to subscribe. To subscribe to our periodic newsletter and receive other updates, please register online by following this link: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>.

If you do not wish to receive this periodic newsletter, or would like to be removed from our email list, please email us at MelbourneACS@state.gov.

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Bring Your Own Photocopies or Pay the Fees

We wish to remind all of our American Citizen Services clients that as announced in our January newsletter and posted on the Mission Australia Consular Services Web site, consistent with the procedure followed by the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney, photocopies as well as the original supporting documents have to be submitted with all applications for passports, Consular Reports of Birth Abroad, Social Security Numbers and federal benefits. We can photocopy the documents for you; however, this service incurs a fee of US\$1.00 per page.

Federal Voting Assistance Program Workshop, May 09, U.S. Consulate

A FVAP official will travel to Melbourne to provide hands-on training for representatives of the local American community who may be assisting U.S. citizens in registering to vote and requesting absentee ballots. This workshop is currently scheduled for May 09 at the U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne. Interested parties may directly contact the American Citizen Services Voting Office at VoteMelbourne@state.gov.

Information for Voting in U.S. Elections

Primary elections have already commenced in the U.S., so it is important that U.S. citizens overseas who wish to vote in the 2008 elections register and request their absentee ballot NOW. The U.S. Consulate General has posted detailed information on this topic on our Web site at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/voting.html>. That information includes links to the Federal Voting Assistance Program at www.fvap.gov, which site includes state by state instructions, a Primary Election Calendar, and information on how U.S. citizens who have never lived in the U.S. may vote. The FVAP also maintains toll free numbers for U.S. citizen voters in certain areas; the one in Australia is 1-800-836325. Please note that votes may not be cast at the U.S. Consulate General; rather, each absentee voter must request and return an absentee ballot using the procedures detailed at www.fvap.gov.

Voting eligibility and residency requirements are determined by the various U.S. states, and are available on-line at <http://fvap.gov/pubs/vag.html>. Your legal state of residence for voting purposes is the state where you last resided immediately prior to departure from the United States. Voting rights extend to overseas citizens even though they may no longer own property or have other ties to their last state of residence, and even if their intent to return to that state may be uncertain. For those who have never resided in the U.S., sixteen states, to date, allow eligible U.S. citizens to register where a parent would be eligible to vote.

To register to vote and/or apply for an absentee ballot, you can use the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). The on-line version, the OFPCA, is accepted by all states and territories except American Samoa and Guam. Voters from American Samoa and Guam must use the standard

form of the FPCA, available at the Consulate General or through many American civic groups. The on-line OFPCA form must be completed legibly, printed, signed, dated, and mailed to your local election officials. Your state may allow faxing to speed the process, but you will still need to send in the original by mail. Use an envelope and affix proper postage. The official U.S. Government website for overseas absentee voting assistance, www.fvap.gov, has a wealth of information about absentee voting, including the state-specific instructions for completing the FPCA form, links to state and local officials, and a downloadable emergency ballot for use by those who register in time but fail to receive an official ballot.

As a general rule, you should try to send in the FPCA so that it reaches your local election officials at least forty-five days before the first election in which you are eligible to vote --- ample time for them to process the request and send you a blank ballot. If applying for both registration and an absentee ballot, you may want to mail the FPCA earlier. One FPCA will qualify you to receive all ballots for Federal offices for the next two regular Federal elections (through 2010). However, we recommend that you submit a new FPCA in January of every year, and whenever you move, to ensure that your most recent mailing and e-mail addresses are on file with your local election officials.

Under normal circumstances, most states and territories begin sending ballots to overseas citizens 30-45 days before an election. However, if you haven't received your ballot within three weeks of your state's ballot receipt deadline, and you are required to return your voted ballot by mail, you should download, complete, sign, date, and send in a Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB), available at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefwab.html>. Make sure it is witnessed if required by your state. If you subsequently receive your regular absentee ballot, execute it and return it regardless of when you receive it. Court decisions sometimes require late counting of ballots voted by Election Day, but received by local election officials for a specified period of time following Election Day.

As part of the Consulate General's outreach, we will host a Voting Workshop later in 2008. Further details will be provided through this newsletter and also posted on our Web site at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs.html>.

CONSULAR OUTREACH – COMING TO A CAPITAL NEAR YOU!!

The American Citizen Services Unit conducts periodic trips to Adelaide, Darwin, and Hobart to provide passport, registration, and other citizenship services that cannot be performed through the mail. We most recently conducted such visits to all three capitals in March. While we are committed to trying to provide this service on a quarterly basis, budgetary restrictions and other constraints may delay these visits. If you wish to register for notices of when a consular officer may be coming to one of these towns for consular outreach, please email us at MelbourneACS@state.gov. The visits are also advertised on our Web site, <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov>.

New Requirements to Renew Passports for Minors from February 01

Effective February 1, 2008, there will be a worldwide change to the way passports are processed for children under the age of 16. For further details, please consult our Web site at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs.html>.

Avian Influenza – Be Prepared!

The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility that Avian Influenza may affect U.S. citizens overseas and provides extensive information on how U.S. citizens may prepare and protect themselves against the global disease. This includes an Avian Influenza Fact Sheet, http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html. Additional information may be available at www.travel.state.gov.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Forms On Line

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax forms for preparing 2007 tax returns are available online at <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/index.html>. Please note that the Consular Section cannot provide U.S. taxpayer assistance, specifically in preparing tax returns. We also do not stock or provide tax forms given that those are now available on line. Rather, all queries should be directed to the IRS using the information at www.irs.gov.

On-Line Appointment Service for American Citizen Services

Following the successful pilot in Sydney, the U.S. Consulate General Melbourne on November 5, 2007, commenced an online appointment service for American Citizen Services provided in the Consular Section. This new appointment system allows Americans requiring services to schedule their appointment times in advance, allowing for a greater flexibility of services and reduced waiting periods. Please book now for appointments over the next two months⁷. Americans are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this new service by booking their appointment online from the relevant service page at melbourne.usconsulate.state.gov. If your service does not require a personal appearance, you will be instructed on how to apply through the mail. For further details, please consult our Web site at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs.html>.

American Community Organizations

For the reference of U.S. citizens in or traveling through Australia, and without endorsing or recommending any specific club or organizations, the U.S. Mission in Australia maintains a list of clubs and/or organizations relevant to U.S. citizens. That list is available at <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov/consular/americanorg.html>.

Travel Information

The Department of State recently revised its Travel Information system to provide Country Specific Information Sheets, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings for places throughout the world. For the most current information published by the Department of State, please go directly to www.travel.state.gov. To receive this information automatically, please register through the Internet-Based Registration System (IBRS) at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>.

Useful Web Sites and Telephone Numbers

The following Web sites and telephone numbers are provided for the reference of U.S. citizens, without endorsing or recommending any organization. The U.S. Consulate General does not accept responsibility for the contents of these sites nor the information provided by these offices.

- * Domestic Violence (24 hours): 1-800-65-6463 (toll free)
- * Rape Counseling: <http://www.casa.org.au> in Melbourne, <http://www.yarrowplace.sa.gov.au/> in Adelaide, <http://www.sass.org.au/> in Tasmania, <http://www.rubygaea.org.au/> in Darwin.
- * For information on Australian visas: contact the Australian Department of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA) at www.immi.gov.au.
- * To obtain Australian birth/death/marriage certificates for all Australian states, visit www.bdm.nsw.gov.au.
- * For questions concerning U.S. customs rules and regulations, check out the U.S. Customs website at www.cbp.gov. For information about taking your pet to the U.S., please consult the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website at www.aphis.usda.gov.
- * Social Security Administration: For the latest in social security information, go to www.ssa.gov for news and announcements.
- * Veterans Administration: Obtain up-to-date information about entitlements to VA benefits at www.va.gov. For VA Education Benefits, go to www.gibill.va.gov.
- * Internal Revenue Service: For tax forms and other timely information, go to www.irs.gov.

Upcoming Holidays and Consulate Closures

For a list of upcoming holidays and Consulate General closures, please consult our Web site at <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/holidays.html>.

This newsletter is published by the American Citizens Services Unit, U.S. Consulate General, Melbourne, e-mail: MelbourneACS@state.gov; website: <http://melbourne.usconsulate.gov>. Effective November 5, 2007, all services by online appointment only.